

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1904
OF THE
MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH.
TO THE
AYLSHAM RURAL DISTRICT COUNCIL.

TO THE
Chairman, Ladies, & Gentlemen of the Aylsham Rural District Council.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I beg to submit to you a report of the health and sanitary condition of your District for the year 1904.

Population.—The census of 1901 showed the population of the District to have decreased by 400 in the preceding ten years. Assuming this rate of decrease, *i.e.*, 40 per cent. per annum, to have continued, I estimate the population at the middle of 1904 to be 16,933.

Births.—The total number of Births registered during the year was 373 (males 201, females 172). The Birth-rate stands at 22 per 1000 population. By referring to Tables I. and II., it will be seen that the Birth-rate has been steadily declining for the last nine years, and that for 1904 a record low rate is established. The falling off in the number of Births is far more marked in the purely agricultural villages of the Eynsford sub-district than in the more well-to-do Buxton sub-district. Comparing the number of Births registered in the year 1896 with the number registered in 1904, it is seen that whereas in the Eynsford sub-district there is a falling off of 84, in the Buxton sub-district the difference is only 23.

This marked decline in the Birth-rate is only one sign, among many others, of the depression existing in Agricultural districts, and if it is true that the country at large depends for its supply of healthy citizens on the rural districts, it is of the highest national importance to foster this decaying industry.

Deaths.—I have again to record a Death-rate which is exceedingly satisfactory, even for a rural district, namely 13·7. The average Death-rate in the district for the past eight years stands at 15·6, but for the last three years it has not reached 14 per 1000 population.

The Death-rate in the two sub-districts is practically the same, being in the Eynsford sub-district 13·5, and in the Buxton 13·7.

Infant Mortality.—The Deaths of infants under one year of age numbered only 39 during the year. Although this is far below the average of 52, and indeed a record for the past eight years, it must be remembered that the number of infants born in the same period was also far below the average of former years.

The infant Death-rate, based on the number of deaths of infants under one year per 1000 births registered during the same period, stands at 104·5, a figure not greatly below the average for the district.

Premature birth was the cause of the deaths of eleven infants, which leaves but 28 due to other causes ; of these five succumbed to whooping-cough.

From the above figures it might be assumed that infant life was well guarded in the district, but I fear much suffering and many deaths of infants are still to be attributed to the ignorance and stupidity of those to whom their tender lives are entrusted.

The country baby has many advantages which the town baby can never enjoy, such as fresh air and sunshine, but, strange as it may appear, the baby in the town, far away from meadows and cows, has greater facilities for obtaining a regular supply of its natural sustenance—fresh milk—than the child whose lot is cast in the country. The difficulty experienced by the poor in rural districts in obtaining a supply of fresh milk for their children is often a very real hardship. Cow keepers, for the most part, consider it a favour to retail milk, preferring either to sell their milk wholesale or to make it into butter. Milk shops, although, perhaps, as necessary for the requirements of a district as beer-shops, are as yet unknown in rural districts.

Old Age Mortality.—As is usual in this district, deaths of persons over 65 years of age constitute nearly half the total mortality, and senile decay is no uncommon cause assigned for death. Among the deaths registered during the year is that of a centenarian well known in the district.

INFECTIOUS DISEASE.

Although the total amount of Infectious Diseases in the district during the year has not been great—only thirty-nine notifications having been received—I regret that, for the first time for many years, Enteric Fever takes a prominent place in the list. I have rarely to report more than three or four cases in any one year, but this year fifteen have been notified. Although the importance of this number can be reduced by showing that nine families only were affected, and that two of the cases were imported from outside the district ; yet any increase in the amount of Enteric Fever in a district is of serious import.

It is, on the other hand, satisfactory to record a great reduction in the amount of Scarlet Fever, and that only two cases of Diphtheria were notified. There was but one death from notifiable infectious disease in the whole district during the year.

Scarlet Fever.—Fourteen cases of Scarlet Fever were notified. There were no fatal cases.

The subjoined Table gives the distribution as to locality and time of year.

TABLE SHOWING INCIDENCE OF SCARLET FEVER.

1904.	AYLSHAM.	COLTISHALL.	HINDOLVESTON	HEYDON.	LAMAS	SCOTTOW.	TOTALS.
JANUARY	1						1
FEBRUARY ..							
MARCH							
APRIL					1		1
MAY							
JUNE							
JULY							
AUGUST							
SEPTEMBER ..		1	3			1	5
OCTOBER			1	2			3
NOVEMBER ..			1				1
DECEMBER ..	3						3
TOTALS ..	4	1	5	2	1	1	14

From this table it will be seen that the disease was most prevalent, as is usually the case, during the last four months of the year. It will also be noticed that the fourteen cases were widely disseminated throughout the district, and in most instances the disease did not spread beyond the initial case. In Hindolveston there was a near approach to an epidemic, but here only five cases were notified in the three months, September, October, November.

During the last four years there has been a remarkable decline in the amount of Scarlet Fever, which formerly was very prevalent in the district. The average annual number of cases for the five years, 1896—90, being 93, while the average for the last four years is only 19.

Enteric Fever.—The Eynsford sub-district has been entirely free from Enteric, but in the Buxton sub-district fifteen cases have been notified, and one death registered. The whole district, up to the beginning of this year, has been remarkably free from this disease. During the three years previous to 1904, there had been a total of but four cases, and in three of these it could be clearly shown that the infection had its origin outside the district.

It is, therefore, very unsatisfactory and disappointing to have now to record such an unusual prevalence of this disease in the Buxton sub-district.

On analysing the cases notified, I find that there were nine families affected, and that of these four were in the town of Aylsham, two in Coltishall, and one in Swanton Abbot.

In the two Coltishall cases the infection was clearly imported. The Hevingham cases were independent of each other, and apparently due to local insanitary conditions.

At Swanton Abbot there were three persons attacked successively in the same cottage, which was situated in a very isolated position in a wood, half a mile from any other dwelling. The water in the well supplying the cottage was found to be at fault, but an attempt to remedy this failed owing to the fact that the expense of providing a pure supply was shown to be out of proportion to the rental of the cottage, as provided by Sec. 3 of the "Public Health (Water) Act," 1878.

Of the four families affected in Aylsham, three lived in cottages in the low part of the town, not far from the river. The water in this locality has for a long time been known to be of a dangerous character, but there have recently been sunk two good tube wells, which are likely to prove of the greatest value to this part of the town. The fourth case in Aylsham was of a very mild type, and occurred in the upper part of the town.

Diphtheria.—The district continues to enjoy almost entire freedom from this disease. Two isolated cases only were notified, and in one of these the infection was clearly shown to have been imported.

Whooping Cough.—This malady, although not conspicuously prevalent during the year, accounted for the deaths of nine children. Aylsham and Coltishall were the localities chiefly affected.

Measles.—The district, with the exception of Aylsham and Coltishall, were fairly free from this complaint. There were no fatal cases.

Vaccination.—Primary Vaccination is well carried out in the district, and the number of children exempt under "The Conscience Clause" is an ever diminishing quantity.

After making enquiries of all the Public Vaccinators, I can find *one* case of re-vaccination to record for the year. This is an improvement on the record of the previous year, but can scarcely be considered satisfactory for the protection from Small Pox of the adult portion of the population of the district.

VACCINATION, 1904.

IN THE EYNSFORD SUB-DISTRICT.

Primary Vaccinations	...	...	...	...	187
Children exempted under Conscience Clause			...	...	5
Summonses taken out	...	...	...	...	0
Re-Vaccinations	...	...	...	...	0

IN THE BUXTON SUB-DISTRICT.

Primary Vaccination	...	...	...	...	176
Children exempted under Conscience Clause			...	...	9
Summonses taken out	...	...	...	...	0
Re-Vaccinations	...	...	...	...	1

SANITARY CONDITION OF THE DISTRICT.

During the year a large amount of Sanitary work, much of it of a permanent character, has been carried out by the Inspectors in their respective sub-districts.

The Sanitary Committee, at their meetings, have always found their hands full of business arising out of action taken by the two Inspectors during the fortnight preceding.

Both Inspectors take a keen interest in their work, and, with the help of elementary books on the subject, and the practical experience gained in the course of their daily duty, will doubtless become valuable officers to the Council.

In the coming year more time and attention will be devoted to systematic inspection, and the making of records, with reference to the actual sanitary condition of some of the more important towns and villages in the district.

Drainage.—Some improvement has been effected in the condition of the ditch at Millgate, Aylsham, which receives part of the drainage of the town. The north bank of this ditch has been filled with oak slabs, the channel being narrowed to half its original width. This will render it the more easy to clean out, and, by increasing the rapidity of the flow of water, there will now be a tendency towards less accumulation taking place.

Two untrapped gullies in Aylsham have been replaced by trapped road gullies. At Sall the drainage from a long row of cottages, which for many years had been most unsatisfactory, has now been permanently put in order.

Foul ditches and private drains in various parts of the district have received the attention of the Inspectors.

Water Supply.—The water supply throughout the district is from private wells; some are deep and others are surface wells. In the small towns and the more thickly populated parts of some villages the well is covered and a pump is used for raising the water. The more general system, however, is to have the wells open and to raise the water in pails.

This latter plan has the advantage of leaving the walls of the well exposed for inspection, but at the same time there is the danger of leaves and other polluting matter finding its way into the water.

As a rule the water supply to cottages outside the large villages and small towns, though sometimes not very palatable, is proved by the experience of those who drink it to be very wholesome.



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When houses and cottages are crowded together as in Aylsham, Reepham, Foulsham, Coltishall, and parts of Cawston, serious danger of pollution ever threatens the purity of the water in the private wells, and in such situations an analysis of the water will generally show some evidence of percolation into it of fluids from a soil saturated with soakage from privy bins, ash pits, and cesspools.

Five new wells have been sunk in Aylsham, and two others have been deepened by the sinking of tubes.

Several wells in other parts of the district have been cleaned out and repaired by the direction of the Sanitary Committee.

The water supply at Aylsham has recently been the subject of enquiry, a proposal having been made that the town should be provided with a public supply. It is much to be regretted, from a public health point of view at all events, that, at a public meeting convened for the purpose of considering the question, it was decided, by an overwhelming majority, not to proceed in the matter. As a consequence of this expression of opinion by the inhabitants of Aylsham, it is likely that the town will for some considerable time longer have to depend on its present unsatisfactory supply from private wells. This being the case, it is a matter of very urgent importance to obtain reliable information as to the quality of the water in the existing wells. This can only be arrived at by a series of analyses, and it is desirable that these analyses be carried out with as little delay as possible. Timely warning could then be given in all cases where the water was found to be of a dangerous character, to purify it by boiling and filtration. More extended use could be made for drinking purposes of water from those wells the water from which was shown to be of good quality.

It is of equal importance to take steps to protect, as far as possible, all the existing wells from pollution arising from cesspools and drains, and especially from soakage from privy bins.

The investigations of the Inspector of the Buxton sub-district shows that in the poorer and most crowded parts of the town there are 153 privies on the sunk bin system. In the case of 97 of these the occupier has no available garden or other land on which he can dispose of the contents of his privy bin when it requires to be emptied. In only 49 instances was it found that the landlord undertook the responsibility of emptying their bins.

The Inspector also discovered, in the same area, 50 privies on the pail or dry-earth system. In twenty-three instances, where this more sanitary system prevailed, there was no land available on which to empty the pails, and in a notable instance the practice of the tenant is to empty the sanitary pails into the common dust-bin of a crowded yard.

From these facts it is evident that in that part of Aylsham covered by the Inspectors report, there exist numerous sunk bins, containing collections of liquid filth of the most virulent poisonous nature, ever threatening the purity of the water in the neighbouring wells.

The universal adoption of the pail system, combined with public scavenging, and the abolition of sunk ash-pits, is the obvious way of mitigating this danger and securing a reasonably satisfactory and safe water supply for Aylsham, now that the prospect of a public supply is for a time abandoned.

Privies.—Twelve new privies have been constructed on the pail system and three with bins. Seventeen privies have been altered or repaired on the report of the Inspectors.

Dairies and Cow Sheds.—Four Dairies in the Eynsford sub-district, and six in the Buxton, are under periodical inspection.

Slaughter Houses.—There are no bye-laws regulating slaughter houses in force in the district, but with constant attention from the Inspectors they are kept in a fairly satisfactory condition.

Overcrowding.—Twelve cases of overcrowding, eight of which were in the Buxton sub-district, were dealt with more or less successfully.

Minor Nuisances Abated.—In the Eynsford sub-district fifty-one nuisances not involving structural alterations were dealt with satisfactorily. Among them are included six filthy cottages which were cleaned and whitewashed.

In the Buxton sub-district fifty-four minor nuisances were abated.

Factories and Workshop's Acts, 1901.—A special table formulated by the Home Office dealing with matters under the Act is attached to this report.

Factories and workshops in an agricultural district are of course few in number.

Bakehouses, which are included in the list of workshops, have been under inspection during the year and are kept in a very satisfactory condition.

I HAVE THE HONOUR TO REMAIN,

YOUR OBEDIENT SERVANT,

HERBERT H. BACK,

Medical Officer of Health to the Aylsham Rural District Council.

ACLE,

March 13th, 1905.

